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SUBJECT: VIETNAM CPC DEMARCHE DELIVERED IN GENERAL MEETING
WITH AFM HUNG

REF: STATE 3137

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met with Assistant FM Nguyen Duc Hung to deliver reftel demarche on a way forward on religious freedom, and took the opportunity to raise other bilateral issues, including human rights, family reunification for Vietnamese refugees in the United States, repatriation of Vietnamese criminal aliens, the new Embassy compound and the American Humanitarian Efforts memorial. He also delivered a demarche on UN reform, reported septel. End Summary.

CPC DEMARCHE

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met January 12 with Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Duc Hung, and delivered reftel demarche, including the "road map" for Vietnam's removal from the list of Countries of Particular Concern for Religious Freedom (CPC). Passing on the document, he noted that the GVN should be mindful of the U.S. policy clock on CPC. The working level review of the CPC countries occurs in June, he said, with a policy-level decision expected in August or September. Therefore, Vietnam should try to accomplish as much as possible before June.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador told AFM Hung that the overall objective is to move religious freedom to the positive side of the ledger in the U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relationship, and thus demonstrate that the two sides have been able to address a difficult issue in a positive way. Resolving this issue before the visit of President Bush and the APEC Summit in November, 2006 would certainly be in Vietnam's interests, he noted.

¶4. (SBU) After Ambassador Marine highlighted some key areas of the demarche, AFM Hung responded. The GVN is committed at the highest levels to implementing the Prime Minister's instruction and the Ordinance on Religion, he said. "The Prime Minister has strong interest and concern on this issue," he continued, "but there is still sometimes some confusion at the local level." AFM Hung related how he had been personally tasked with traveling to the Central Highlands to see how the PM's instruction and the Ordinance were being implemented. He found that the provincial officials profess that they are carefully and scrupulously enforcing the central government's mandate, but that at the district level and below the knowledge of the new laws varies. Still, he said, there has been progress. The passing of Christmas without "disorderly incidents" despite widespread Christian celebrations is an indicator that the local authorities in the Central Highlands are finding ways to protect the country from "elements who wish to use religion to create disorder" while protecting religious freedom. In the Central Highlands in 2005, AFM Hung said, the provincial governments sent letters to "all the

religious chapters" inviting them to organize Christmas festivities and offering to provide security against anyone who would disrupt these festivities for their own purposes.

15. (SBU) The Ambassador acknowledged that there have been positive developments in Vietnam, and asked for AFM Hung's assistance in documenting those positive developments and ensuring that they continue. The GVN needs to make a concerted effort to educate the international community, including the United States, about changes in Vietnam's religious environment. AFM Hung pledged to do so, and added that the USG's information is sometimes distorted, provided by those who have ulterior political motives.

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16. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that he had received good news from Dak Lak Province, where 27 individuals from nine families received passports and other documents they needed to begin the necessary out-processing formalities associated with their applications to join their family members who immigrated to the United States as refugees. He said he hopes this is a signal that all pending cases will now go through, which would be a significant step towards achieving our mutual goal of family reunification.

AMNESTIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

17. (SBU) The Ambassador said he understands that there may

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not be an amnesty this year during the Vietnamese New Year period, but he hopes that the GVN will consider our request to release several individuals of concern, including Pham Hong Son. AFM Hung said that he talked to officials from the Ministry of Public Security who believe that the United States has some incorrect information regarding some of the cases of concern. AFM Hung promised to get more specifics and get back to us.

18. (SBU) Regarding dissident Hoang Minh Chinh, the Ambassador acknowledged that Chinh has not suffered any harassment in recent weeks, but noted that there are still plain-clothes police near his home and his cell phone and internet service have been cut off. Chinh should be treated like any Vietnamese citizen and allowed to live in peace, the Ambassador urged.

REPATRIATION

19. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the issue of repatriation of Vietnamese citizens who have lost the eligibility to remain in the United States by committing illegal acts. The United States wants to restart discussions on this issue, he said, but need to get past the idea of resettlement payments, which the United States cannot accept. The United States does not want to invoke restrictions on visa issuances, but this is a possibility if Vietnam does not meet its obligations under international law to accept its citizens. AFM Hung had no response on this issue.

NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND

110. (SBU) The Ambassador thanked AFM Hung for his efforts to assist the Embassy in obtaining agreement on the Agreed Minute for the land for the New Embassy Compound (NEC). He asked that we continue to concentrate on this issue and finalize the acquisition within the next six months. The State Department, the Ambassador said, will be in touch with

the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington to discuss the next steps on the GVN's desire to move forward with property in San Francisco and Washington. AFM Hung said he is very glad that there has been progress on this issue, and that he hopes the Vietnamese Embassy and Consulate General in San Francisco will be able to resolve their outstanding issues over land and buildings as a result.

AMERICAN HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS MEMORIAL

¶11. (SBU) The Ambassador asked if the MFA has had a chance to consider his earlier proposal that the United States and Vietnam work on creating a memorial in Vietnam recognizing the humanitarian efforts of Americans during the war. AFM Hung informed the Ambassador that the MFA spoke with the Vietnam Veterans' Association about this issue, but unfortunately "we do not yet have any common understanding on this issue." The Ambassador noted that the American Secretary of Veterans' Affairs is considering a visit to

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Vietnam, and said that the memorial could be a deliverable for that visit. AFM Hung noted that the visit of the VA Secretary would be very sensitive, and likely not possible

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before the National Communist Party Congress scheduled to take place in April.

MARINE